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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour over a network of NBC radio stations, Monday, July 19-37.

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Well folks this is watermelon and cantaloupe season for a large part of the country and everywhere you look on the markets you see piles of tempting melons, trucks loaded with melons are rolling along our main highways and long strings of boxcars laden with melons are on their way to market. I had a letter the other day from a man who was complaining that melons are not so sweet or juicy as when he was a boy many years ago. Sometimes I think that the appetite of the normal growing boy has a lot to do with his memories of good things to eat in afteryears.

As a matter of fact I think the melons we get nowdays are far superior to those we stole from somebodys melon patch when we were boys, only the stolen melons tasted better, or we thought they did. To begin with, healthy, disease-free vines are essential to the production of good melons. You simply can not get the sugar or the flavor in the melons if the vines are suffering from any one of several leaf diseases. These diseases are more prevalent now than they were say forty or fifty years ago and it means a fight on the part of the grower to control them, but the diseases are being controlled by spraying and by the breeding of disease resistant varieties so that the growers are picking melons from clean healthy vines.

But, I think I hear some of you folks who depend upon the markets for your supply of melons saying, "What chance have I to know if the melons that I see on the market grew on healthy vines or not?" Perhaps the melon grew in Georgia or if it is a cantaloupe it may have come all the way from California or the melon fields of Colorado but for all that there are certain earmarks or indications on the melons that tell the story within a reasonable degree of accuracy. For example if a melon has been picked too green it will have a piece of the stem attached to it and the background color beneath the netting will be a pure green. If picked overripe or from a diseased vine the melon will have a pale yellow or faded appearance. If the background color of a muskmelon has a slight golden color showing through the netting and the blossom end, which is the end opposite the stem, is firm and does not show paleness of color, then you can be reasonably sure that the melon came from a healthy vine.

In the case of muskmelons the stage of ripeness at which the melons are picked has a great deal to do with their flavor and sweetness. Melons that are picked too green do not have a chance to store flavor and sweetness. Those that are allowed to become overripe become flat and tasteless, so there is an intermediate stage which in the case of the cantaloupe is indicated by the stem scar, where the melon was removed from the vine. In case the melon was picked too green the stem will be adhering to it, if

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moderately ripe a small portion of the base of the stem will remain, but if picked full ripe no part of the stem will remain and there will be a clean scar. The presence of little globules of reddish brown sugar around the stem scar is a pretty sure indication that the melon is sweet.

In the case of watermelons, a good melon usually has a bright clean appearance with a sort of "bloom" all over its rind. The stem should be plump and green. The melon should be uniform and symmetrical and free from blemishes. As a test of ripeness turn the melon up so that you can see the part that rested on the ground and of the background color of this part is a slight golden yellow you are pretty safe in assuming that the melon is ripe.

As I said good healthy vines are essential to growing either good watermelons or good cantaloupes and the grower must spray his crops from the very start in order to control diseases. Considerable progress is being made in the breeding of varieties that are resistant to the various diseases. The Hales Best No. 45 which has recently been developed for mildew resistance in the Imperial Valley of California is a good example, or the new wilt resistant watermelon known as Pride of Muscatine which was recently introduced by the workers in Iowa.

I am not going to burden you with bulletin numbers today but if any of you growers are having trouble with your melons just write your state college or experiment station or to us and we will endeavor to help you. There is one thing we can not do and that is tell you how to keep the boys from raiding your melon patch and stealing the melons for Oh Boy aren't those stolen melons sweet?

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